

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STAFF NOTE

Review Item:

Harvard Executive Education Leadership Project (ExEL)

History/Background:

Existing Policy. Kentucky was selected by the Wallace Foundation as one of four states to participate in Cohort 1 of the ExEL Project. A state level and four Harvard-selected district teams of eight members were chosen to learn how to improve student achievement by using a coherent framework (Public Education Leadership Project - PELP). The purpose was for the faculty of Harvard University's Colleges of Education, Business and Government to share insights, research, resources and their field experiences on how to lead the core business of teaching and learning to a team of Kentucky education leaders. PELP is designed to help leaders effectively: **a) identify problems, b) create theories of action, c) develop and implement strategies and d) manage and evaluate district and school level performance.** The four Kentucky school districts (Jefferson County, Boone County, Kenton County and Daviess County) and a state leadership team are the participants. Superintendents from each of the participating districts will be part of the presentation on this topic at the February meeting along with KDE staff.

ExEL is designed to focus on each of the following three inter-related levels of growth and development— individual, team and network. ExEL is:

- 1) an executive leadership program designed to develop **individual** leadership skills in promoting high quality instruction;
- 2) a team development program designed to increase the capacity of a **team** and others at the school, district or state level to work in ways that focus all team meetings and adult interactions on improving instruction; and
- 3) a state and district effort that brings together chief state school officers and their teams and stakeholders with superintendents and district teams in the state to create and/or strengthen a state **vertical alignment network (VAN)** to address common challenges in ways that can help bring high quality instruction to scale.

ExEL Focuses on Four Key Strands of Development:

System development—The key concepts are organizational coherence and alignment, helping leaders build an organizational improvement strategy that focuses all aspects of the system on the bottom line goal of strengthening teaching and learning. This includes management of human and other resources, systems and structures, development of culture, and engagement with stakeholders -- all in ways that maximize these desired outcomes.

Leadership development— Key concepts include the distinction between technical problems, that individuals and organizations know how to address, and adaptive challenges that require

leaders and organizations to invent new solutions and approaches; and the distinction between leadership and authority, and knowing when and how to use each. Leadership development is personal (understanding that for systems and teams to change, we need, as individuals, to understand our own resistances to change, to expand our skills, and explore our own vulnerabilities) and organizational (knowing how stakeholder factions and system dynamics affect organizations and how we lead them).

Team development— A central idea is the development of collaborative norms for all adult interaction throughout the district or state agency – norms that are focused on the work of instructional improvement. At any point in a meeting, for example, participants should be able to understand what problem they are trying to solve, what it has to do with improving teaching and learning, what data are being used to understand the problem and what criteria will be used to assess its proposed solution.

Instructional focus – A key concept is the instructional core, which is the relationship of students and teachers in the presence of content. There needs to be a sense of urgency about the task, a shared understanding of what good teaching is and how it can be brought to scale, and a deep understanding and application of the practices of improvement that help a district reduce the great variability within schools and districts between good and poor instruction. Although instructional improvement (bringing to scale high quality teaching and learning) is the overarching goal of the ExEL initiative, and is thus embedded in all three other strands, the instructional focus strand provides specific knowledge and skills in how to do this, providing an important practical complement to leadership, team, and system development.

The district and state teams attended two week-long summer institutes on Harvard's campus, in-state fall and spring two-day institutes and regular KVAN meetings since July 2006. The four districts and state team have collaborated and shared resources, processes and protocols used to develop a common understanding of high quality instruction. Each team has contributed to the project and created tools and resources that will assist the state in scaling up the project to school districts all across the state with the ExEL districts serving as models for other districts.

The state team's theory of action is:

- **If** the Offices of the Bureau of Learning Results Services (BLRS) work collaboratively with each other and through the instructional support and content networks across the state to address problems of practice by developing, collecting and sharing models of high quality instruction with teachers, coaches/lead teachers and school/district leaders,
- **Then** schools will have the understanding and resources they need to develop and deliver high quality instruction in every classroom every day for every student.

The state's plan of action to implement this theory of action includes:

1. By April 2009, the Bureau of Learning Results Services will produce a package of resources that accompany one classroom video clip from the content areas of math, science, English/language arts, and social studies that supports a framework for high quality instruction.
2. By Spring 2009, the Bureau of Learning and Results Services will have a plan for intra- and inter-office ongoing collaboration.

3. By Spring 2009, the Bureau of Learning and Results Services will have created structures and protocols for sharing and scaling up the ExEl work across the state.
4. By August 2009, the Bureau of Learning Results Services will have developed a functioning Professional Learning Resource Portal.

Policy Issue(s):

The ExEl Project ends with the April 2009 In-State Institute; however, the ExEl work must continue beyond the life of the grant and align with the existing KBE Strategic Plan and revised statutes and administrative regulations in order to reach proficiency for all.

Impact on Getting to Proficiency:

The state's rationale for their theory of action and plan of action explains the impact of getting to proficiency for all students. The state's goal is: **High Quality Instruction Every Day in Every Classroom for Every Child.**

Students will only be able to learn and apply the knowledge, processes and skills defined by Kentucky standards *if* they are effectively engaged with challenging content under the guidance of a skilled, knowledgeable and responsive teacher who holds them to clear, high expectations.

Teachers will only be able to engage students with challenging content in ways that produce effective learning results *if* they are supported with high quality, aligned instructional resources and with on-going, continuous opportunities to learn about, generate and receive feedback about, and reflect on the quality of their instruction and the work of their students within a school and district culture of clear, high, accountable expectations.

School and district leadership will only be able to achieve high quality instruction and continuously improving academic achievement *if* they galvanize effort around a shared vision of what constitutes high quality teaching, learning, and content, set ambitious goals with monitoring and feedback systems to achieve this vision, and construct all elements of their organization to facilitate rather than constrain success.

Contact Person:

Sally Sugg, Associate Commissioner
Office of Leadership and School Improvement
502/564-2116
Sally.Sugg@education.ky.gov

Deputy Commissioner

Interim Commissioner of Education

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